

A Vision for California Agriculture  
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Perspective based on the following involvement in agriculture –  
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There are numerous ways to think about the future of agriculture – in my five minutes I want to focus on agriculture as more than a food producing industry. While I believe that California agriculture is an essential strategic asset to our nation as it provides a significant quantity of the food we consume, I also believe that the other things agriculture provides represent agriculture's opportunity to elevate itself in the minds of the non-farm population.

*My vision for California agriculture by 2030----*

More than the people on the farm are engaged – or have an understanding of the intricacies of producing a crop. We reconnect California's urban population to the fundamental reality that food and agriculture in their region is the foundation upon which their lives depend.

This frame for agriculture will require work on both sides of the equation – on agriculture's side, thinking about the production and delivery of their product in new ways – and actually what their product is – food AND water quality, AND open space AND air quality, AND groundwater recharge, AND energy production, AND stewardship services. On the other side of the equation – the non – farm population participating in the costs of providing these services – both in dollars and sacrifices.

Additionally, my vision includes California farmland, the most productive farmland in the world, being declared an endangered species such that it gains the status it deserves. Because with that status, I believe it will have a better chance of garnering the associated water, as well as other resources, for production, if of course, agriculture is contributing to the ecological and social values people are looking for.

*The biggest challenge in achieving this vision?*

Agriculture recognizing that it is not an industry in and of itself, but part of a world whose ecological and social sensitivities have changed, right along with the economic realities of the business. The general public has heightened concerns about the environmental and social consequences of agriculture. Our challenge will be to move that needle from negative consequences to positive consequences – we do that, and I believe the commitment by non-farm populations to the resources that produce the benefits inherent in agriculture – food, open space, groundwater recharge, and the list goes on – will follow.

This will take out of the box thinking and out of the box action – trying to do this completely within the system we have now is not realistic – after all, doing the same thing and expecting different results is the definition of insanity.

*In 2030, how has public perception of agriculture changed?*

This depends on what we do between now and then. If we get people connected to their food so that when they see a tomato on their plate, they subliminally recognize that it took water, people, expertise, open space, air quality, etc. to get that tomato to their plate AND that that tomato is an important ingredient in their good health, AND that it took good farmland to grow that tomato – we will have done our job.

I believe that the quality of a product will include ecological values and attributes. Currently, California can not compete in many crops as the low-cost producer. Value to consumers must be derived from other product attributes, such as point of origin, ecological and social values. Until the market compensates for these values, Federal and state policy and programs need to offer incentives and compensation to farmers, ranchers, and fishermen for providing stewardship services, energy production, water quality protection, recycling of urban wastes, etc.

*What is a “must have” in an Ag Vision for California?*

These are not necessarily in the order of importance –

- Providing opportunities for revenue from on-farm energy production, tourism, education and other value-added services – in addition to food production. More diverse revenue streams provide flexibility, and reduce the risk of being concentrated in one source of income.
- The RETURN in return on investment needs to include the attributes/benefits offered by stewardship services, enhancements to air quality, open space, recharge to ground water.
- Many are seeking sustainable farming knowledge, with few sources provided to access it. UC Cooperative Extension and higher education institutions are the logical providers. Augmenting budgets, along with institutional incentives to researchers and extension agents, are needed to move to this end.
- Risk share in the value chain and new business models are needed.
- Health and agriculture in CA have a definite intersection – we need to take advantage of that in connecting people to agriculture – what we will save in health care costs could easily pay for the external costs.
- More collaboration between individuals, organizations, businesses, and government agencies.
- Currently Californian's are largely unaware of where their food comes from, and the effects production practices, distribution, and policy have on the health of communities. With more understanding of the ways that individual, community and environmental health are related, more Californian's would support the State's move to create a sustainable agriculture and food system.